

WILD NEWS

Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge

Nature Program Calendar October–December 2004

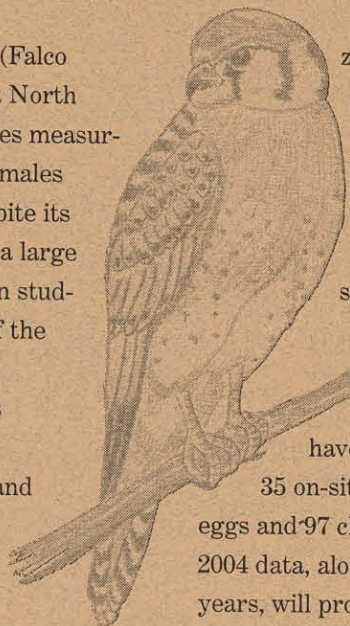
The American Kestrel A Key Sentinel Species

By Jennifer Keyser

The American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is the smallest North American falcon, with males measuring just 9-10 inches and females 9-12 inches in length. Despite its small size, this raptor has a large role as a sentinel species in studies regarding the health of the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge's wildlife.

Since 1997, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) biologists have conducted a nest box study program to monitor kestrel health and reproductive success. Using 35 on-site artificial nest boxes, and 33 more off-site, the birds' activity is monitored to determine their nesting stage and (as applicable) the number of eggs and hatchlings.

Kestrel nest box monitoring is an important part of the Service's biological monitoring program at the Refuge. This includes both the effort to identify any relationships between the exposure of animals to contaminants and their reproductive success, and also to monitor the effectiveness of the cleanup in cutting off pathways for contaminants that may impact wildlife. Currently, there are 10 kestrel nest boxes located in what were historically areas with higher levels of contaminants and 25 boxes in the buffer



zone area that had lesser or no levels of contaminants. In 2003, 33 of the 35 boxes supported a kestrel nesting attempt, and 26 of those nests were known to be successful in fledging at least one chick. Data for 2004 is still being collected. To date, there have been 29 active nests in the

35 on-site boxes, with a total of 165 eggs and 97 chicks produced. The final 2004 data, along with data from earlier years, will provide important information tracking the overall health of these birds and the effectiveness of the cleanup program. Kestrels at the Refuge have also been selected for another important study, jointly conducted by the Service and the U.S. Geological Survey on the effects of West Nile Virus (WNV) on kestrel populations. As an initial step in assessing potential WNV impacts on raptors, the kestrel was chosen for monitoring because it has exhibited WNV-like symptoms in Colorado, and also because of their high numbers and accessibility at the Refuge. The Service is fortunate to have such significant numbers of kestrels for these important biomonitoring programs, with their potential to benefit so many other animals.

(The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Noelle Ronan, Service

wildlife biologist. For further information on kestrel biomonitoring please contact her at Noelle_Ronan@fws.gov)

Sources:

Personal communication with Noelle Ronan, Wildlife Biologist, Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, July 12, 2004
www.id.blm.gov/bopnca/amkest.htm
www.tpwd.state.tx.us/nature/wild/birds/kestrel.htm

Commerce City Acquires Prairie Gateway Land *Plans Include New Soccer Stadium and Additional Practice Fields*

During the month of June, Commerce City acquired approximately 917 acres of land from the U.S. Army at Rocky Mountain Arsenal. The purchase of this land was the culmination of years of effort by City officials and Arsenal representatives. The Refuge Act of 1992 mandated this land, known as the Western Tier Parcel (Prairie Gateway in Commerce City) be sold to Commerce City at fair market value for commercial development.

Prairie Gateway continued on next page.

REFUGE VIEWS

Dean Rundle, Refuge Manager
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



The old adage that — “the only thing constant is change”— is seldom truer than it is these days at Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Many of those changes are cause for celebration. Cleanup progress, removal of the old chemical factories, transfer of land to the Service, formal establishment of the National Wildlife Refuge, and restoration of native prairie are positive changes that we can all take a lot of satisfaction from. Other changes present challenges and your Refuge will be facing some of those challenging changes this fall.

Due to anticipated reductions nation-wide in refuge operating budgets, staffing levels at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR will be reduced in the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2004. Those cuts will mean that we won't have as many people working to deliver our visitor programs as we've had in previous years. You'll still meet helpful, smiling faces when you visit — there will just be fewer of them. We'll do everything possible to maintain the quality of our programs, and our goal is to ensure that our visitors continue to enjoy safe and enjoyable wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities throughout the year.

I take some satisfaction in the knowledge that our four-legged customers care not about these kinds of changes. Theirs is an existence challenged by the changes of season more than changes in budgets. This issue of Wild News covers the months of October - December 2004. Fall is my favorite time of year and it's a great time to visit the Refuge. This IS the best place in the country to see big mature mule deer bucks. You'll miss a special treat if you don't come out this November during the rut to see these impressive, magnificent animals. We hope to see you soon.

Dean Rundle, Refuge Manager

Prairie Gateway continued from front page

The proceeds from this sale will be used to construct a new Visitor Center for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Prairie Gateway Authority, a group comprised of Commerce City officials, local businesses and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service representatives, was formed in the spring of 2003 to oversee the use and development of the land. Although plans have not been finalized, the majority of the land will be preserved as open space, including some trails along the perimeter of the Refuge. Initial plans call for the development of an environmental education center, retail space, a new civic center and a hotel/conference center.

In addition, Kroenke Sports Entertainment and Commerce City recently announced plans to construct a new soccer-specific stadium. The stadium will be the new home of the Colorado Rapids, and will include additional practice fields to be used for training and youth leagues. Commerce City also is planning to expand 56th Avenue and Quebec Streets to accommodate additional traffic.

The Prairie Gateway Authority plans to ensure noise and light impacts will not have any adverse effects on the Refuge.

Reservations are required for these popular programs. Space is limited. Call (303) 289-0930 to register.

For all programs please wear sturdy shoes and dress accordingly to the weather. If you have questions about which programs would be appropriate for certain ages, please ask when making your reservation. All children must be accompanied by an adult. All programs and activities are FREE. Assistance dogs are welcome.

Wild Rides

Saturdays 9:00 - 11:00 am

Sundays 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Fall is the perfect time to visit your Refuge. The colors are changing and the wildlife is plentiful. On this two-hour guided tour you are likely to see some spectacular bucks along with a wide variety of other wildlife such as coyotes, hawks, and migratory birds. Be sure to bring your camera and binoculars — you never know what you might see. Our apologies, a tour will not be offered on October 3.

Register early for these FREE activities by calling (303) 289-0930

OCTOBER

Bike the Refuge

Saturday October 2 1:00 - 3:00 pm
Witness the change of seasons from the seat of your bicycle. Stimulate all of your senses as you ride past lakes, prairie dog towns and through wooded areas. Water bottles and fat, puncture proof tires are highly recommended. Helmets are required.

Wildlife Watch Workshop

Sunday October 3 1:00 - 5:00 pm
Take part in this workshop designed to sharpen your sights and senses. Offered by the Colorado Division of Wildlife. See flyer insert for more details.

Fall Photo Tour

Saturday October 9 8:00 - 10:00 am
Photographers rejoice! Come enjoy the Refuge's amazing fall colors and abundance of wildlife on this guided photo tour.

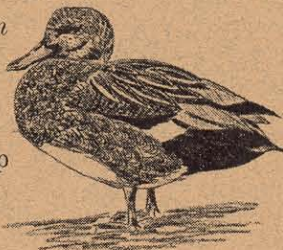
Wild Things 2004

*Saturday October 16
10:30 am - 3:00 pm*

Join this special celebration of National Wildlife Refuge Week 2004. Activities include hayrides, tours, activity booths, and a special appearance by President Theodore Roosevelt. Fishing will be available for kids 12 and under only. Have your picture taken with one of our animal mascots. Enjoy the fall colors as you stroll on our scenic trails. A light lunch will be available for purchase from the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Society.

Duck, Duck, Goose

Saturday October 23 1:00 - 3:00 pm
Want to learn more about quackers and honkers? Explore the habitats and unique adaptations of these birds and learn to identify them with the help of a waterfowl expert.



Halloween Happenings

Sunday October 31 10:00 am - noon
See if you can be the best-dressed wild animal on the Refuge! Prizes will be awarded for the most creative costume. Make a spooky treat, and then hop on a hayride for a chance to spot our resident wildlife.

NOVEMBER

Refuge Residents

Saturday November 6 9:00 - 11:00 am
During this fun-filled adventure, learn about the animals that call the Refuge home and create a craft to take with you. Recommended for children ages 4-7.

Restore Your Refuge

Sunday November 14 1:00 - 3:00 pm
It's autumn and the leaves are falling, the deer are in rut and the Refuge needs some housekeeping. We need help keeping YOUR Refuge beautiful! Bring gardening gloves if possible.

Recommended for ages 9 and up.



Magnificent Mulies

*Sunday
November 21
10:00 am - noon*

Search the Refuge for mule and white-tailed deer bucks. Learn why Refuge deer have some of the largest racks in Colorado. Cameras and binoculars are recommended.

Turkey Trot

Saturday November 27 2:00 - 4:00 pm
This is not your typical turkey trot! Join a fun program about this beautiful bird and learn why Benjamin Franklin wanted the wild turkey on a seal and not on our table.

Check Out Those Antlers!

Sunday November 28 9:00 - 11:00 am
Watch for that unforgettable shot, with your camera that is. This morning photo opportunity will fill up fast!

DECEMBER

Winter Raptors

Saturday December 4 1:00 - 3:00 pm
The Refuge is known for its large numbers of raptors. Learn how to identify these wintering birds and then head out on a tour in search of ferruginous and rough-legged hawks, bald eagles, and owls.

Disappearing Treasures

*Sunday December 12
10:00 am - noon*

Join us for an exciting exploration of the National Eagle and Wildlife Property Repository. Learn more about illegal wildlife trade throughout the world, the Native American eagle distribution program, and how this facility benefits wildlife and the public. Space is limited-don't miss this special opportunity!



Eagles on Holiday!

*Sunday December 19
10:00 am - noon*
People are not the only ones who travel to warmer destinations when winter arrives. Learn about eagles, their migration, and their life here on the Refuge.

Holiday Tour

Sunday December 26 1:00 - 3:00 pm
Have company for the holidays and need something fun to do? This special holiday tour is just for you. You can anticipate seeing majestic bald eagles, spectacular mule and white-tailed bucks and a variety of other animals. Light refreshments will be provided by the Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Society.

Visit our website at <http://rockymountainarsenal.fws.gov>.

Reservations are not required for the following programs.

Wild Treks Drop-in Program

Saturdays and Sundays

8:00 am - 4:30 pm

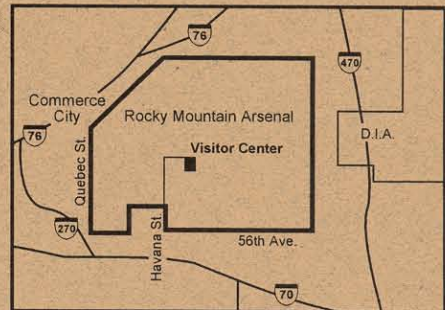
Enjoy the cool, crisp days of fall while you relax and enjoy the changing of the seasons. Wander through the Visitor Center exhibits, create a new craft, inspect the new activities in the Wildlife Learning Lab, and enjoy the great outdoors on our trails. The Refuge will be closed on Saturday, December 25.

Scout Packs

Saturdays and Sundays

8:00 am - 4:30 pm

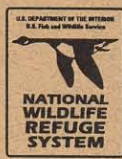
Attention all scouts! Check-out a backpack filled with field study guides, binoculars and other activities to help fulfill badge requirements and head out on the trails!



Directions to the Refuge:

Enter the Refuge at 56th Avenue and Havana. Parking is available at the Visitor Center.

Anglers Please Note: On October 3, 9 and 10 the Refuge will be open for fishing from 8 am - 4 pm. The last day to fish until sunset is October 2.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge
Building 111
Commerce City, CO 80022-1748

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Visit our website at <http://rockymountainarsenal.fws.gov>